

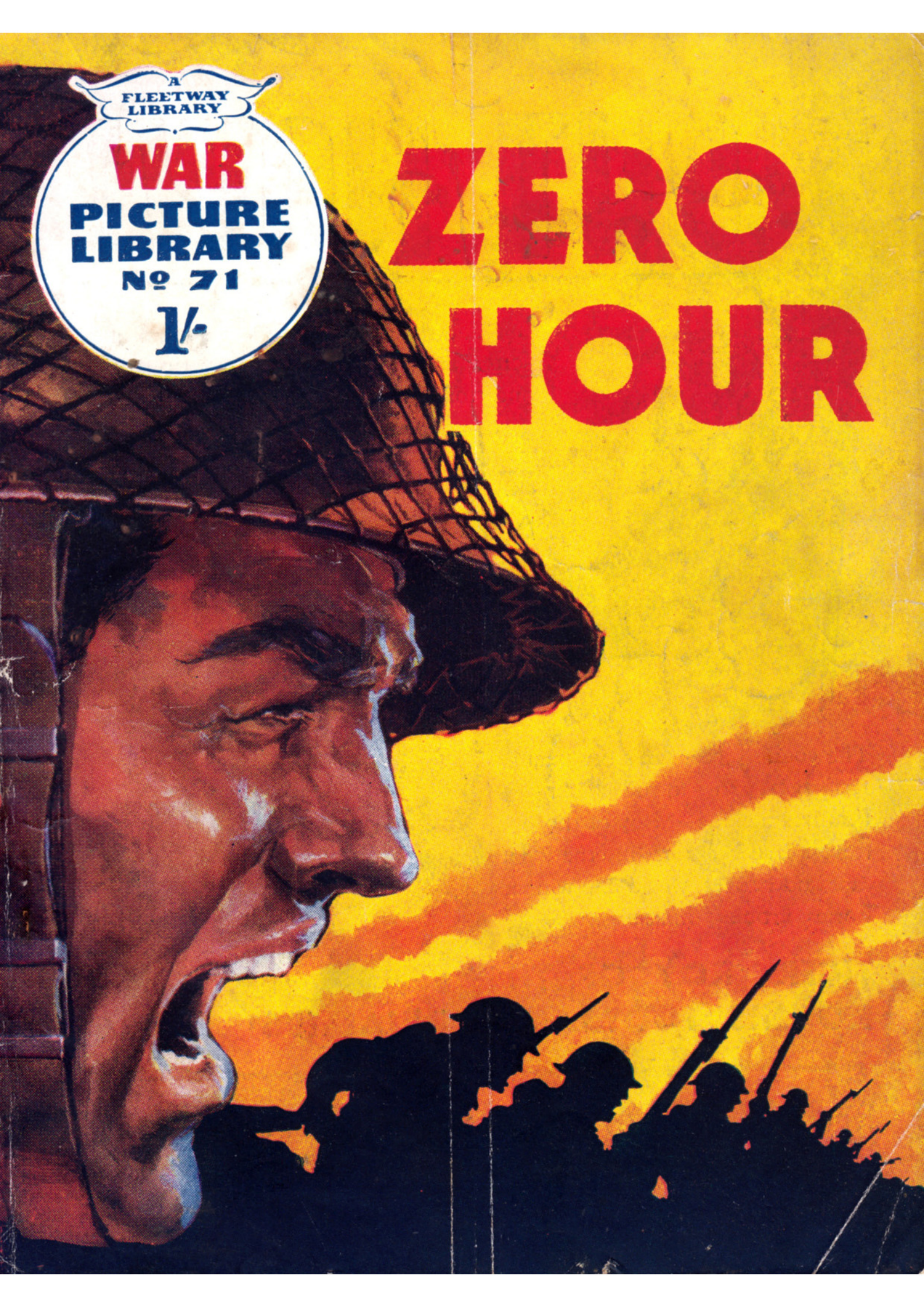
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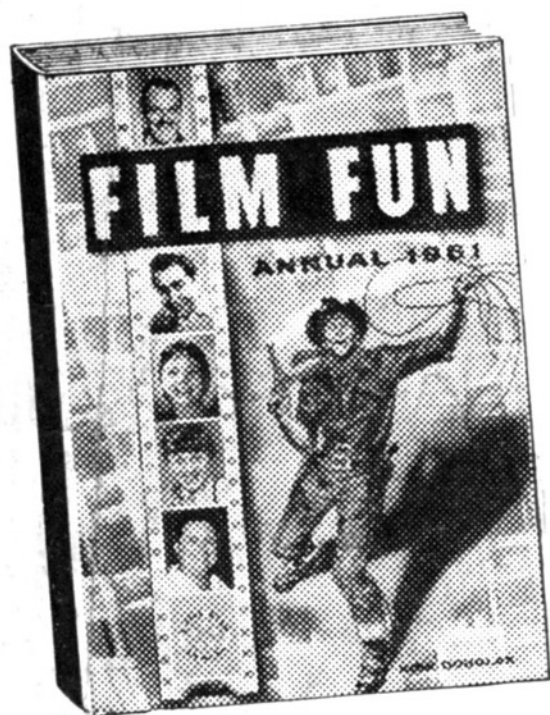
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ZERO HOUR



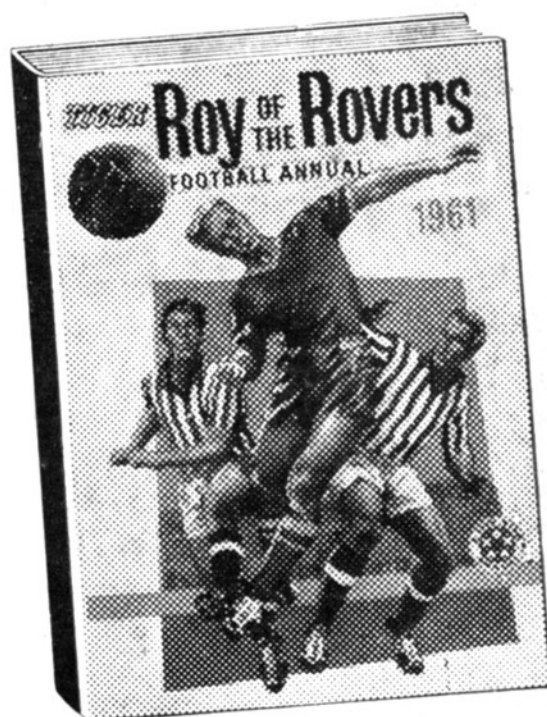
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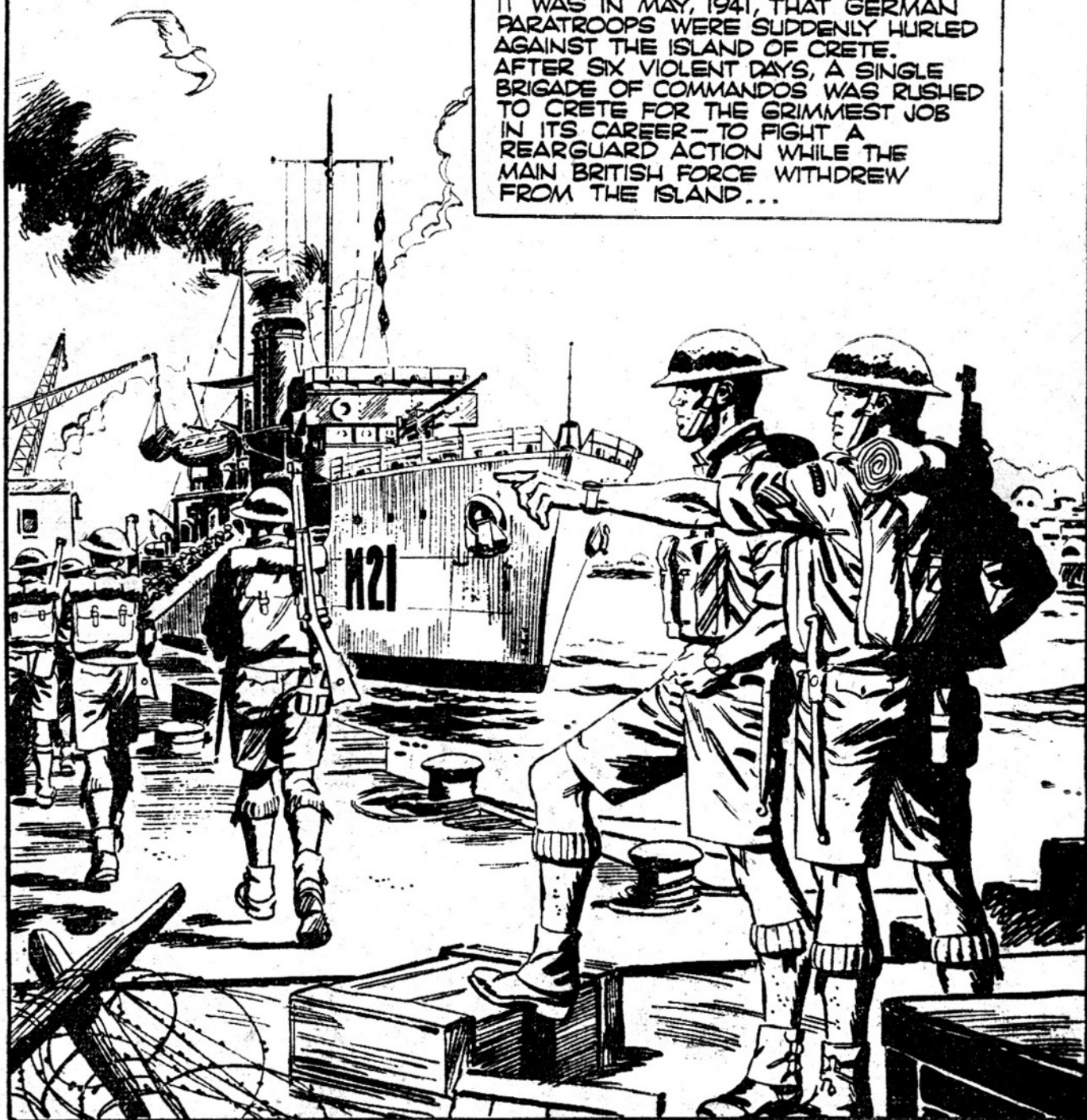
TIGER 'ROY OF THE ROVERS' FOOTBALL ANNUAL 1961 **8'6**

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ZERO HOUR

IT WAS IN MAY, 1941, THAT GERMAN PARATROOPS WERE SUDDENLY HURLED AGAINST THE ISLAND OF CRETE. AFTER SIX VIOLENT DAYS, A SINGLE BRIGADE OF COMMANDOS WAS RUSHED TO CRETE FOR THE GRIMMEST JOB IN ITS CAREER—TO FIGHT A REARGUARD ACTION WHILE THE MAIN BRITISH FORCE WITHDREW FROM THE ISLAND...



Chapter 1. EXPENDABLE

ON THE NIGHT OF THE 26TH. MAY, H.M.S. ABDIEL LAY OFF SUDA BAY, IN CRETE, WHILE THE COMMANDOS DISEMBARKED IN THE PITIFULLY FEW LANDING CRAFT AVAILABLE...



THE BATTERED LANDING CRAFT PITTERED TOWARDS THE SHORE THROUGH THE MURKY, MOONLESS DARKNESS - EACH ONE CRAMMED TO CAPACITY WITH KIT-LADEN MEN.



IT WAS COMMANDO SERGEANT ALEC PRICE WHO HAD ASKED THE QUESTION. ALEC HAD BEEN AT THE RAID ON BARDIA A MONTH BEFORE, AND KNEW FROM EXPERIENCE HOW VULNERABLE THE SLOW-MOVING L.C.S. WERE TO SHORE BATTERIES. BUT SUDA BAY STAYED QUIET...

WE'RE NOT BEACHING, SERGEANT— IT WOULD MEAN TIME WASTED ON REFLOATING; AND WE WANT A QUICK TURN-ROUND!

RIGHT, SIR— WE CAN WADE THE REST! COME ON, LADS— OVER YOU GO, AT THE DOUBLE!

THE COMMANDOS SPILLED ON TO THE BEACHES, LUGGING AMMO AND SUPPLIES WITH THEM. SERGEANT PRICE SOUGHT OUT HIS SECTION COMMANDER...

THIS IS GOING TO BE FUN, SIR! WE'VE NO ARTILLERY— NOT EVEN MORTARS! THERE'S ONLY SIXTEEN BREN GUNS IN THE WHOLE BRIGADE!

MORE REASON WHY WE'LL HAVE TO GET INTO ADVANCED POSITIONS BY DAWN! THE CLOSER WE ENGAGE, THE MORE THE ODDS ARE IN OUR FAVOUR!



Zero Hour

THE COMMANDOS MOVED INLAND THROUGH THE BATTERED TOWN OF SPHAKIA, PAST HUDDLED MASSES OF WEARY, DISPIRITED BRITISH TROOPS...

IT'S THE BLOOMIN' COMMANDOS—SOMEBODY'S TOLD THEM THERE'S A WAR ON!

THEY'LL LEARN SOON ENOUGH WHEN THE STUKAS COME BACK!



THE INFANTRY REAR-GUARD POSITIONS WERE ONLY THREE QUARTERS OF A MILE FROM SPHAKIA. THERE THE COMMANDO LEADER DISCUSSED THE SITUATION WITH THE YOUNG CAPTAIN IN CHARGE...

THE HUN SHELLLED US STEADILY YESTERDAY AND HE'S BEEN PUSHING US BACK FROM CLOSER RANGE WITH MORTAR-FIRE—AND WE CAN'T DO A DARNED THING! IF WE HAD JUST ONE SIX-POLINDER...

SORRY—WE HAVEN'T EVEN A MORTAR! BUT MY CHAPS ARE PRETTY EXPERT AT CLOSE FIGHTING WITH LIGHT WEAPONS!



MEANWHILE, SERGEANT ALEC PRICE HAD TAKEN HIS PLATOON OFF THE ROAD, AND UP THE HILLSIDE TO A POINT FAR IN ADVANCE OF THE INFANTRY POSITIONS...



THIS DO, SARGE?

YES—FAR ENOUGH FOR THE TIME BEING! GET LOST AMONG THE HEATHER, AND WAIT FOR DAWN!

THE COMMANDOS WOULD ENGAGE THE ENEMY IN THEIR OWN UNORTHODOX WAY—STRIKING SUDDENLY AT THE ENEMY FROM BEHIND. SERGEANT PRICE WRIGGLED DEEP INTO THE HEATHER...

JERRY KNOWS WHERE HE LAST SAW OUR INFANTRY—AND HE THINKS THAT'S WHERE HE'LL FIND THEM AT DAWN...



AT DAWN, A CHILL MIST LAY ON THE HILLSIDES OVER-LOOKING SPHAKIA.



HERE THEY COME, SARGE—A JERRY PATROL!

I KNOW! GET DOWN—AND WAIT FOR IT!

Zero Hour

TWO MINUTES LATER...

NOW?

NO—LET
THEM GET SET
UP! THERE MAY
BE OTHERS...!



BARELY TWENTY-FIVE
YARDS AWAY, THE
GERMAN PARATROOPS
BEGAN SETTING UP
THEIR MORTAR...

THIS'LL SORT THEM
OUT! THEY'RE SURE
TO HAVE MACHINE-GUN
COVER— SO KEEP
YOUR EYES OPEN FOR
ITS FLASH AS SOON
AS THE BALLOON
GOES UP!



SERGEANT PRICE'S ARM SWUNG SUDDENLY IN A POWERFUL ARC— THE GRENADE HURTTLED THROUGH THE AIR— AND...



BUT AS THE LETHAL THUMP OF THE GRENADE ECHOED FITFULLY AWAY, AND THE REEKING FUMES OF ITS EXPLOSION DRIFTED PAST IN THE WIND, THE HILLSIDE STAYED EERILY QUIET...



WELL, SARGE
—NO HUN
MACHINE-GUNS!

THAT'S WHAT YOU
THINK, CHUM— THEY'RE
SITTING UP THERE
WAITING ON A
TARGET! JUST ONE
MOVEMENT, THAT'S
ALL THEY NEED !

Zero Hour



AS THE BULLET-RIDDLED CORPORAL
PITCHED BACKWARD INTO THE
HEATHER, THE TORRENT OF HEAVY
FIRE SPRAYED MURDEROUSLY ACROSS
THE HILLSIDE...



GET OUT OF IT,
EVERYBODY! FLAT
ON YOUR FACE,
AND CRAWL!

YARD BY YARD, WITH INFINITE CAUTION, THE
COMMANDOS WORKED THEIR WAY BACK
ACROSS THE OPEN SPACES, UNTIL AT LAST...

WELL, WE'RE LUCKY
TO GET OUT OF THAT
LOT WITH OUR HEADS
STILL ON! HOW
MANY HAVE
WE LOST?

TWO, I THINK,
SARGE - PETERSON
AND ROWLAND'S
COPPED IT IN
THE FIRST TWO
MINUTES!



FROM FURTHER DOWN THE GULLY, ANOTHER
PLATOON OF COMMANDOS APPEARED, A
CAPTAIN IN THEIR LEAD - PART OF THE NEW
COMMANDO FORCE MADE UP IN THE MIDDLE
EAST...



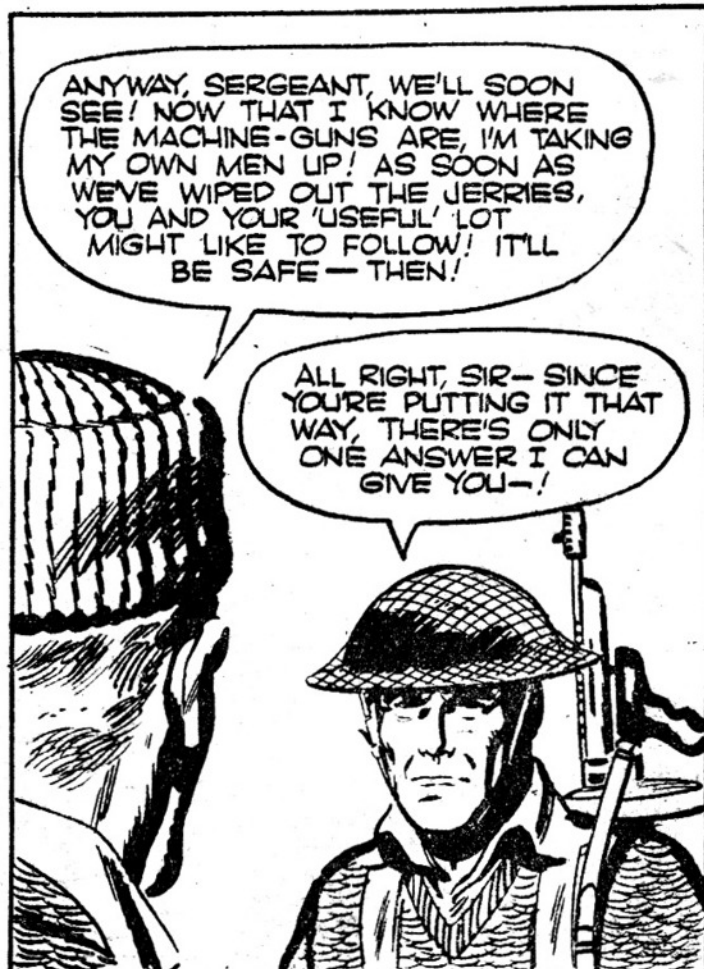
WE SAW YOUR LITTLE OPERATION
UP THERE, SERGEANT! IT STARTED
WELL -!



UP TILL THE
POINT WHERE
MY CORPORAL
STARTED
DICING - YES!



BUT THE CAPTAIN WAS TOUGH—AND SERGEANT PRICE BEGAN TO REALISE JUST HOW TOUGH...



ALTHOUGH SERGEANT PRICE KNEW THAT HE WAS GOING TO CERTAIN DEATH, HIS HONOUR AS A COMMANDO AND A LEADER HAD BEEN CALLED IN QUESTION - AND HE TURNED TO HIS MEN...

I'M GOING WITH THE CAPTAIN - AS A VOLUNTEER! IF ANY MAN DOESN'T WANT TO COME WITH ME, IT WON'T BE COWARDICE, BUT STARK GOOD SENSE - AND I'LL UNDERSTAND!

WHERE YOU GO, SARGE - WE GO!

AYE! THAT'S FOR ALL OF US!

IN GRIM SILENCE, THE SERGEANT SWUNG HIMSELF UP THE ROCK FACE, AND SLITHERED INTO THE HEATHER BESIDE THE CAPTAIN...

ALL RIGHT, SERGEANT - WE'LL PLAY THIS COOL! WE ARE THE EXPENDABLE REAR-GUARD - SO WE'LL HIT JERRY HARD, REAL HARD, BEFORE WE'RE WRITTEN OFF!

SURELY IT'S MORE IMPORTANT TO HOLD JERRY - DEAD MEN AREN'T MUCH USE AS REAR-GUARDS, ARE THEY?



WITH SKILL AND CUNNING, THEY WORKED THEIR WAY UP THE DANGEROUS HILL...

NEVER FORGET, SERGEANT—
OFFENCE IS THE BEST METHOD
OF DEFENCE! I LEARNT THAT
AS A KID— I'VE NEVER
FORGOTTEN IT!

PERHAPS NOT,
BUT WHEN THEY PIN
US DOWN HALF-WAY
UP THE HILL, THEN
PERHAPS YOU'LL START
REMEMBERING OTHER
THINGS YOU LEARNED—
COMMON SENSE FOR
INSTANCE!

THEN SUDDENLY, THE HEATHER AND
SCRUB THINNED IN FRONT OF THE
CAPTAIN AND THE SERGEANT...

IT'S GOT TO
BE CROSSED—
SO NOW WE'LL
FIND OUT IF
JERRY'S WITH
IT!

IN THAT
CASE, SIR—
ME FIRST!

SERGEANT PRICE, SLIDING FROM COVER,
WENT SWIFTLY FORWARD, CRAWLING
ACROSS THE EXPOSED ROCK...

SINCE IT SEEMS
I'M GOING TO STOP
ONE IN THE END,
IT MIGHT AS WELL
BE NOW...

TWO HUNDRED YARDS TO THE EAST, A GERMAN MACHINE-GUN PARTY WERE SETTING UP THEIR GEAR. THE LOOKOUT SAW THE STEALTHY FIGURE IN KHAKI...



SERGEANT PRICE REACHED COVER SAFELY— BUT AS THE CAPTAIN MADE TO FOLLOW HIM...



Zero Hour

WOUNDED IN THE LEG, THE CAPTAIN SLID HELPLESSLY BACK DOWN THE ROCK FACE—AND THEN HIS VOICE RANG OUT DESPERATELY—



AN ORDER WAS AN ORDER—AND THE HILLSIDE BECAME SUDDENLY ALIVE WITH COMMANDOS, SERGEANT PRICE AMONG THEM...





IT WAS A MASSACRE. SERGEANT PRICE, ZIG-ZAGGING IN THROUGH THE HEATHER, WELL ABOVE THE OTHERS, KNEW THAT FEW OF THEM WOULD GET NEAR ENOUGH EVEN TO USE THEIR TOMMY GUNS...



JUST LIKE THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE! BUT THEY WERE LUCKIER — THEY HAD HORSES!

THE MUZZLE OF THE SPANDAU SWUNG--
AND A VIOLENT BLOW ON THE LEFT
SHOULDER SENT SERGEANT PRICE
SPINNING SIDWAYS...



IN LESS THAN TWO MINUTES, THE
HEATHER-CLAD SLOPES HAD BECOME
A BODY-STREWN DESOLATION...



THE SERGEANT HAD FALLEN
ABOUT FIFTY YARDS FROM
THE GERMAN EMPLACEMENT--
AND WITH A BULLET IN HIS
SHOULDER, HE WAS EASING
PAINFULLY FORWARD, DEEP IN
THE OBSCURING HEATHER...



I'LL GET WITHIN
RANGE, IF IT'S THE
LAST THING I
DO!

TEN MINUTES LATER...



RAISING HIS TOMMY-GUN WITH INFINITE CARE, THE SERGEANT TOOK DELIBERATE AIM - AND -



THE COMMANDO SERGEANT LAUNCHED HIMSELF FORWARD LIKE A TIGER, AND CROSSED THE LAST TWENTY-FIVE YARDS...



WITHOUT PAUSING IN HIS ONWARD RUSH, SERGEANT PRICE HURLED HIMSELF ACROSS THE HOLLOW AND OVER THE ROCK RIM ON THE DOWNWARD SIDE—SO THAT HE WAS SCREENED FROM THE MACHINE-GUNS' HIGHER UP, AND AS HE SPRAWLED INTO THE HEATHER ONCE AGAIN...

DONALDSON! THANK HEAVENS SOMEBODY'S LEFT!



NICE WORK, SARGE—YOU BEAT ME TO IT BY A FEW YARDS!

THEY WORKED THEIR WAY BACK DOWN THE HILLSIDE IN SILENCE. TWENTY MINUTES LATER, AS THEY DROPPED INTO THE GULLY...

IT'S ALL RIGHT, CAPTAIN LENNOX—SERGEANT PRICE AND ANOTHER MAN HAVE GOT BACK!

SO HE'S GOT OUT ALIVE, HAS HE—WOUNDED LEG AND ALL...!



WITH RAGE BURNING INSIDE HIM AT THE THOUGHT OF HIS LOST COMRADES, THE SERGEANT STRODE ALONG THE GULLY TO FACE THE CAPTAIN...



HOW COME I FIND YOU HERE, CAPTAIN—YOU WERE GOING UP THE HILL TO WIPE OUT SOME JERRIES—REMEMBER?

DROP IT, SERGEANT—WE'RE ALL IN BAD SHAPE—WE WERE LUCKY EVEN TO GET AWAY!

BUT THERE WAS A LOT ON SERGEANT PRICE'S MIND—AND HE CAME OUT WITH IT, BLUNTLY...



YOU WERE LUCKY! IN FACT, IF YOU HADN'T CALLED THE MEN OUT OF COVER JUST WHEN JERRY HAD YOU PLUMB IN HIS SIGHTS, YOU WOULDN'T BE HERE NOW! LUCKY BREAK, WASN'T IT—GIVING JERRY SOMETHING ELSE TO TURN HIS GUN ON!

ARE YOU SUGGESTING THAT TO SAVE MY OWN SKIN, I DELIBERATELY...



LENNOX, WHITE WITH ANGER, HAD GRABBED FOR THE BUTT OF HIS SERVICE REVOLVER— AND AS HE DID SO, PRICE SWUNG DOWN HIS TOMMY-GUN, AND NICKED OFF THE SAFETY CATCH...



AND THEN SUDDENLY A QUIET VOICE CUT ACROSS THEM BOTH...

I'D STOW IT RIGHT NOW—BOTH OF YOU!
WHY DO JERRY'S JOB FOR HIM? WE'LL
NEED EVERY MAN—AND EVERY
BULLET!

THANKS,
DONALDSON...
I... I LOST
MY HEAD...



THE CAPTAIN SANK BACK AGAINST THE ROCK, AND THE SERGEANT,
HIS ANGER EBBING FROM HIM, DROPPED HIS TOMMY-GUN TO HIS
SIDE, AND SWAYED SLIGHTLY ON HIS FEET. HE WAS A BADLY
WOUNDED AND WEARY MAN...

ALL RIGHT, CAPTAIN—
I'VE BEEN SHOOTING OFF
MY MOUTH IN THE WRONG
WAY AND AT THE WRONG
TIME—AND I'M SORRY...!

FORGET IT, SERGEANT—
WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT
OF HERE—THAT'S ALL
THAT MATTERS NOW...



Chapter 2. DOOMED ISLAND

FIVE MINUTES LATER, THEY WERE PICKING THEIR WAY CAUTIOUSLY ALONG THE GULLY—AND STRANGELY, THE SERGEANT WAS SUPPORTING THE HOBBLING CAPTAIN ON HIS GOOD SHOULDER...



AND SOON...



AT THE LORRY BARRICADES, THE CAPTAIN'S LEG WOUND WAS ROUGHLY DRESSED, AND THE OTHERS WERE SEEN TO...

THEY TELL ME THE EVACUATION'S BEEN UNDER WAY SINCE MIDNIGHT—SPHAKIA'S BEEN CLEARED OF ALL THE ORDINARY TROOPS! WE STAY PUT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE, WHENEVER THAT IS!



WE'LL HAVE TO FIND OUT MORE THAN THAT ABOUT BRIGADE ORDERS! DOES THAT CAR STILL GO?

THE CAR WAS SERVICEABLE. SO THE SERGEANT EXPLAINED THE POSITION TERSELY TO CAPTAIN LENNOX—AND FOR THE BRIEFEST OF INSTANTS, ENMITY FLARED UP BETWEEN THEM AGAIN...

YOU'RE STILL PRETTY MOBILE, PRICE, AND THIS BARRICADE IS CRITICAL—IT'LL NEED EVERY MAN! SO I'M GOING MYSELF—MY FOOT'S NOT SO BAD THAT IT WON'T WORK CAR PEDALS!

FUNKING IT AGAIN, LENNOX—GETTING OUT WHILE THE GOING'S GOOD...



CAPTAIN LENNOX EASED HIMSELF AWKWARDLY BEHIND THE WHEEL—AND AS THE CAR LURCHED AWAY, THERE CAME THE FIRST SIGNS OF THE BATTLE TO COME...



I SUPPOSE WE'VE SEEN THE LAST OF HIM!

MORTAR BOMB!

JERRY'S COME DOWN THE HILL—GET READY, LADS!

Zero Hour

THE ENEMY, STILL UNAWARE THAT THE BRITISH HAD NO ARTILLERY, HAD GROPED THEIR WAY CAUTIOUSLY DOWN THE HILLSIDES, AND WERE MAKING TO STRADDLE THE ROAD...



A MILE FARTHER DOWN THE ROAD, CAPTAIN LENNOX WAS BUMPING AND JOLTING TOWARDS SPHAKIA...



HE REACHED THE TOWN ITSELF TO FIND
A WAR-SHATTERED, GHOSTLY DESOLATION...



FOR TWELVE HOURS, THE FEW OVER-WORKED LANDING CRAFT
AND OTHER VESSELS HAD BEEN SHUTTLING THE MAIN BRITISH
FIGHTING FORCE OFF THE BEACHES AND OUT TO THE WAITING
SHIPS—AND THEY WERE STILL AT IT, UNDER THE CEASELESS
ASSAULT OF ENEMY DIVE-BOMBERS AND FIGHTERS...



Zero Hour



BUT LENNOX STIFFENED—AND SWUNG AWAY DECISIVELY...

SORRY, SIR—MY JOB'S WITH THE COMMANDOS. I MERELY CAME DOWN HERE ON A RECONNAISSANCE!

ALL RIGHT, CAPTAIN—YOU KNOW YOUR DUTY! THE BEST OF LUCK!



LENNOX ACCELERATED SAVAGELY UP THE ROCKY COASTAL TRACK...

NO TANKS—NO ARTILLERY—NO AIRCRAFT—ONLY A HANDFUL OF THE BEST-TRAINED TROOPS IN THE WORLD, THROWN AGAINST A MECHANISED ENEMY! LIKE RED INDIANS AGAINST A HOWITZER! WHAT LIE IS COURAGE WITHOUT CANNON...?



IN TEN MINUTES, LENNOX WAS CLIMBING UP THE MAIN ROAD INLAND...

LOOK, HAN'S—AN ENGLANDER CAR!



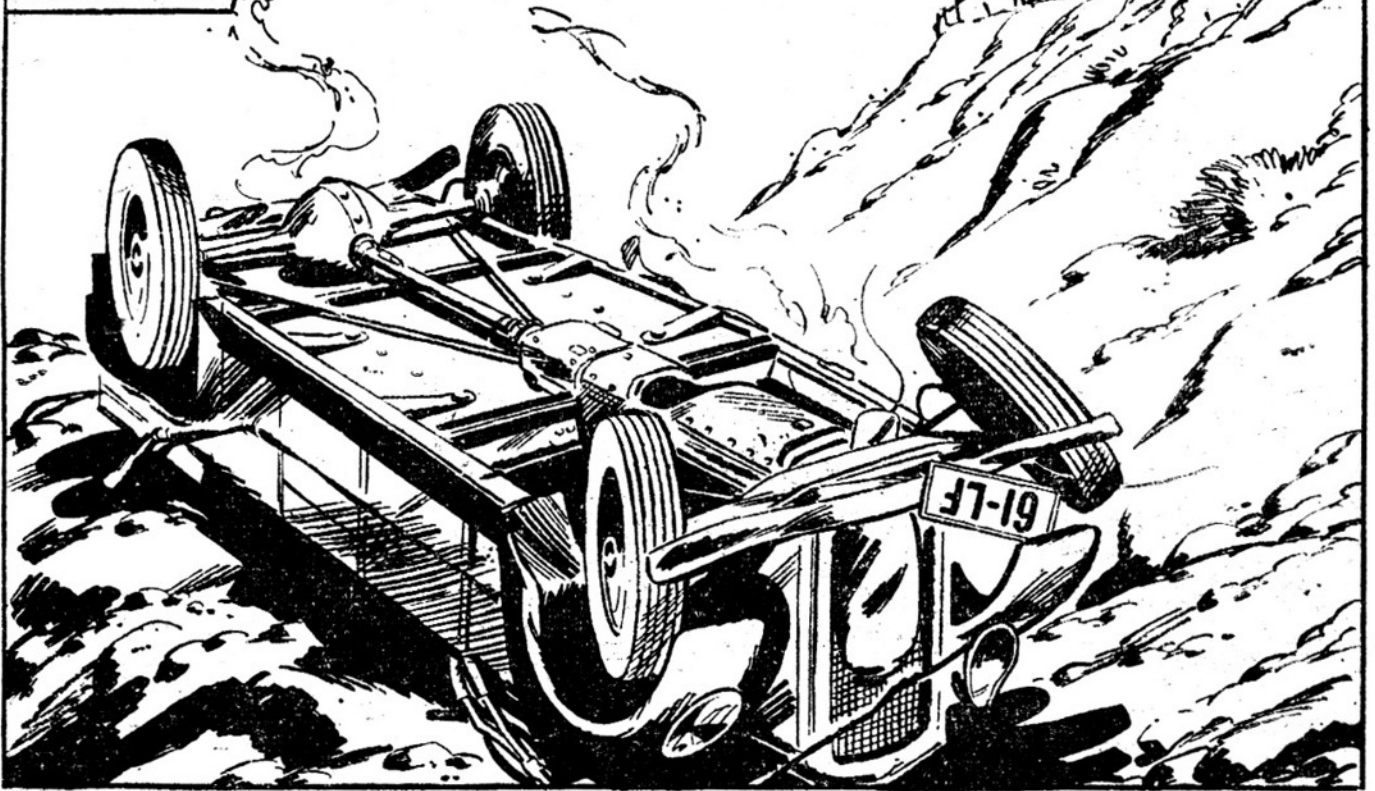
SUDDENLY, THE WINDSCREEN BEFORE LENNOX'S FACE STARRED VIOLENTLY...



ENEMY MACHINE-PISTOL FIRE SMASHED THROUGH WINDSCREEN AND BODYWORK. LENNOX SPUN THE WHEEL FRANTICALLY—



...THEN THE WORLD WAS WHIRLING OVER AND OVER, THERE WERE COLOSSAL JARRING SHOCKS, AND THEN BLACKNESS...



SEVERAL HOURS LATER, LENNOX STRUGGLED BACK TO LIFE— TO FIND HIMSELF SPRAWLING BENEATH THE OVERTURNED CAR...



HE FORCED HIS WAY OUT INTO THE OPEN AIR— AND SAW THAT THE SUN WAS LOW IN THE WEST. THE DISTANT CRACKLE OF MACHINE-GUN FIRE BROUGHT HIS MIND PAINFULLY BACK INTO FOCUS...

MUST HAVE BEEN IN THAT WRECK FOR HOURS... GOT TO FIND OUT WHAT'S HAPPENING....!



LENNOX STUMBLED VAGUELY IN THE DIRECTION OF SPHAKIA—
SOMETIMES FALLING, BUT ALWAYS DRAGGING HIMSELF UP AGAIN...



AN HOUR LATER, HE CLIMBED CAUTIOUSLY THROUGH THE
RUBBLE ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF SPHAKIA...

GREAT
SCOTT!

THOUGHT YOU WERE A
JERRY, SIR—IN FACT, I ALMOST
GAVE YOU MY LAST FEW ROUNDS
WHEN YOU CAME IN SIGHT!



THE COMMANDO CORPORAL HAD BEEN PINNED BY FALLING RUBBLE— AND LENNOX MANAGED TO DRAG HIM CLEAR, TO FIND THAT HIS LEG WAS IN A BAD WAY. THE CORPORAL HAD A GRIM STORY TO TELL...



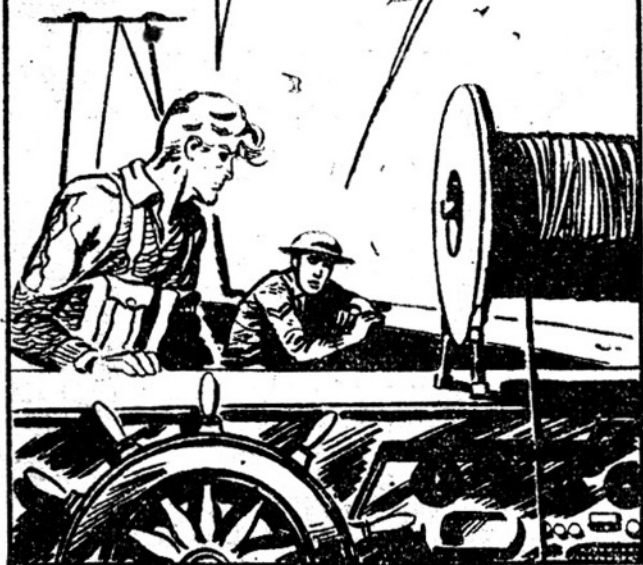
THOUGH WOUNDED HIMSELF, LENNOX TOOK THE CORPORAL'S WEIGHT— AND THEY STAGGERED THROUGH THE TOWN TO THE BEACHES...



LENNOX HELPED THE CORPORAL ON BOARD, AND MADE A HURRIED CHECK-UP...

HALF FULL PETROL TANK! WHERE WILL THAT TAKE US? THE NEAREST SAFE LAND-FALL, NOW, IS EGYPT— RIGHT ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN!

CAN'T WE GRAB THE SUPPLIES OUT OF THE OTHER LANDING CRAFT?



NO— THERE MAY BE OTHER SURVIVORS, AND THEY'LL NEED THE OTHER CRAFT AND EVERYTHING IN IT! WE'LL TAKE OUR CHANCE WITH WHAT WE'VE GOT!




BUT THAT'S SUICIDE, SIR— WE WON'T EVEN GET A THIRD OF THE WAY ACROSS THE MED ON A HALF FULL TANK!

BUT CAPTAIN LENNOX HAD MADE UP HIS MIND— AND THE SUPPLIES IN THE OTHER LANDING CRAFT WERE LEFT UNTOUCHED.



I STILL SAY WE OUGHT TO HAVE GRABBED EVERYTHING WE COULD!

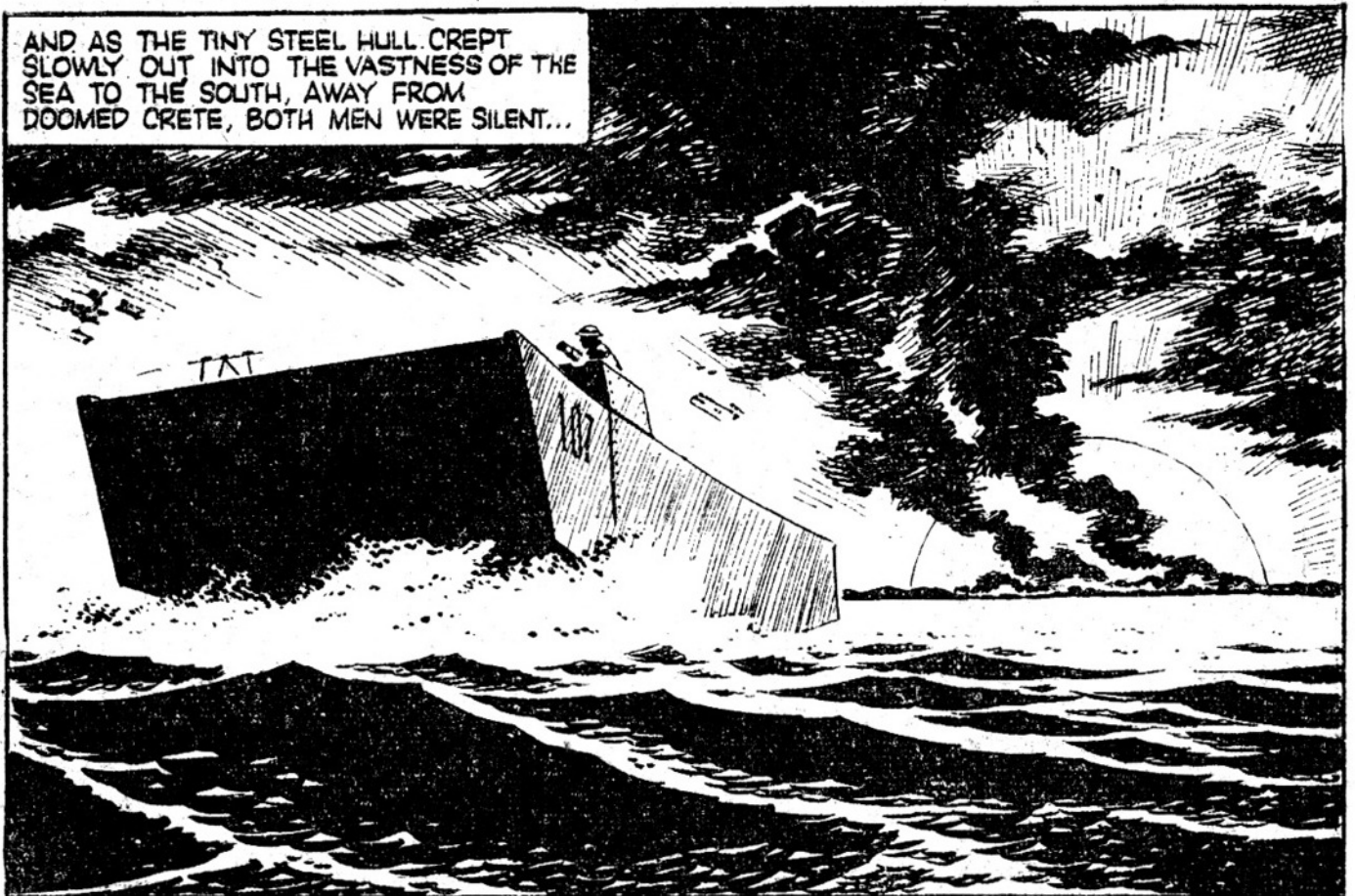
GET THIS QUITE STRAIGHT, CORPORAL— IF THERE HAD BEEN ONLY ONE LANDING CRAFT, WE WOULD HAVE STAYED ON THAT BEACH! I WOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN AWAY THE LAST CHANCE OF ESCAPE FROM THE MEN STILL FIGHTING IN THE HILLS! SO THINK YOURSELF LUCKY TO GET AWAY AT ALL!




THE CORPORAL WAS NOT THE FIRST TO DISCOVER THAT CAPTAIN LENNOX WAS A STRANGE, BUT FORTHRIGHT MAN. HE DID WHAT HE THOUGHT RIGHT, REGARDLESS OF THE RISK TO HIMSELF—AND OTHERS. THIS WAS HIS GREAT FAULT—AND ALSO HIS VIRTUE...

ALL RIGHT, SIR—BUT WHEN THE ENGINE GOES PHUT, AND WE START DRIFTING, A HUNDRED MILES FROM ANYWHERE, THAT'S WHEN THE RECKONING WILL COME! WE CAN'T AFFORD TO PLAY THE HERO—NOT IN OUR CONDITION...


AND AS THE TINY STEEL HULL CREPT SLOWLY OUT INTO THE VASTNESS OF THE SEA TO THE SOUTH, AWAY FROM DOOMED CRETE, BOTH MEN WERE SILENT...



Chapter 3. MAD LENNOX



THE FALL OF CRETE WAS ONE OF THE SADDEST CHAPTERS IN BRITISH MILITARY HISTORY. IT WAS A LESSON IN THE VALUE OF AIR POWER—FOR THE LUFTWAFFE HAD REIGNED IN THE SKIES UNCHALLENGED, AND THE WEHRMACHT HAD STRUCK WITH NEW AND POTENT WEAPONS—PARATROOPS AND AIRBORNE TROOPS.



BUT FOR THE ROYAL NAVY, AND THE DESPERATE COURAGE OF REARGUARD FORCES, BRITISH LOSSES WOULD HAVE BEEN EVEN HEAVIER THAN THEY WERE. AS IT WAS, FIFTEEN THOUSAND MEN WERE LEFT BEHIND...

THE COMMANDOS HAD BEEN FLUNG INTO CRETE BECAUSE EVERY SKILLED FIGHTER WAS NEEDED TO HOLD THE ENEMY—AND AT THE END, MANY OF THEM GOT AWAY, DARINGLY, BRILLIANTLY, FOR EACH MAN HAD BEEN TRAINED TO BE SELF-RELIANT...



AND IN THE YEAR THAT FOLLOWED CRETE, AND THE DISASTERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST, THIS KIND OF TRAINING WENT FORWARD WITH REDOUBLED VIGOUR...



YET DURING THE DARK YEARS OF SIEGE, WHEN ALL EUROPE WAS IN GERMAN HANDS, THERE WAS MUCH OPPOSITION TO THE IDEA OF COMMANDO RAIDS...

— BUT, BRIGADIER, MY COMMANDOS NEED ACTION! YOU CAN TRAIN A MAN JUST SO FAR—AND THEN HE GETS DEMORALISED IF HIS FIGHTING POWER ISN'T EXERCISED!

I KNOW THAT, COLONEL, BUT THESE MEN ARE THE CREAM OF THE BRITISH ARMY! THEIR LIVES SHOULDN'T BE SQUANDERED ON HIT-AND-RUN RAIDS— THEY SHOULD BE SPREAD OUT THROUGH THE REST OF THE ARMY AS INSTRUCTORS!



THEN FATE TOOK A HAND. AT A CERTAIN PLACE ON THE BELGIAN COAST, THE ENEMY BUILT A POWERFUL NEW RADAR STATION. BOMBER COMMAND WANTED IT DESTROYED—AND MILITARY INTELLIGENCE WAS INTERESTED IN ITS SECRETS...

YOU WILL AGREE, SIR, THAT THIS IS JUST THE JOB FOR COMMANDOS!

IT'S EITHER THAT, OR BOMBING IT—AND WE COULD USE THE GEN THE COMMANDOS WOULD BRING BACK!

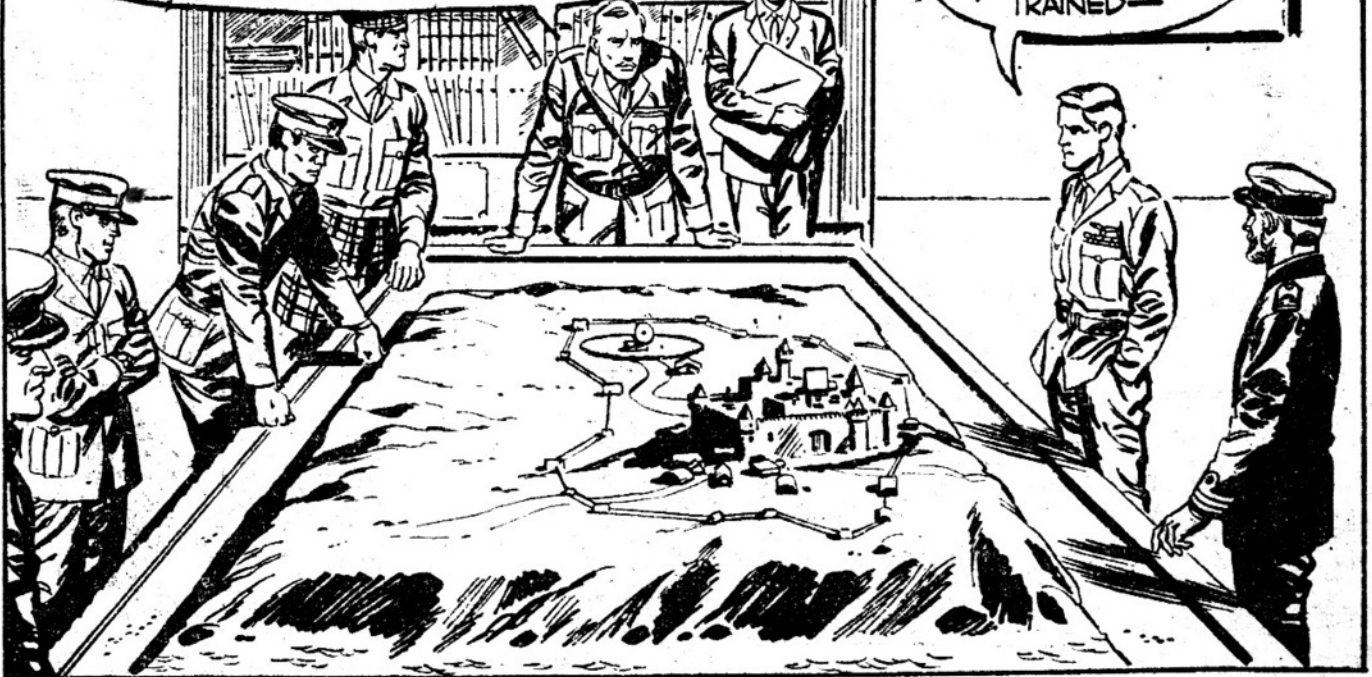
VERY WELL! IT'S A USEFUL JOB THAT HAS TO BE DONE—SO I THINK WE CAN TAKE THE RISK!



COMBINED OPERATIONS STAFF MOVED SWIFTLY. A MODEL OF THE RADAR SITE WAS PREPARED FROM RECONNAISSANCE PHOTOGRAPHS...

WELL, YOU SEE THE LAYOUT CLEARLY, GENTLEMEN! IT WILL BE A STRAIGHTFORWARD ASSAULT FROM LANDING CRAFT—THE IMPORTANT ELEMENT IS *SURPRISE!*

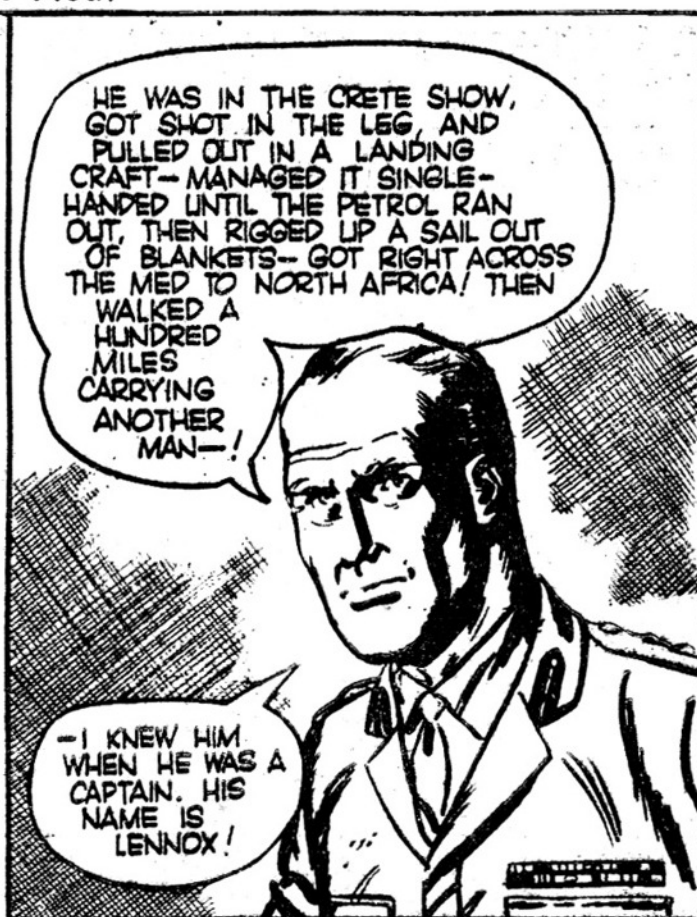
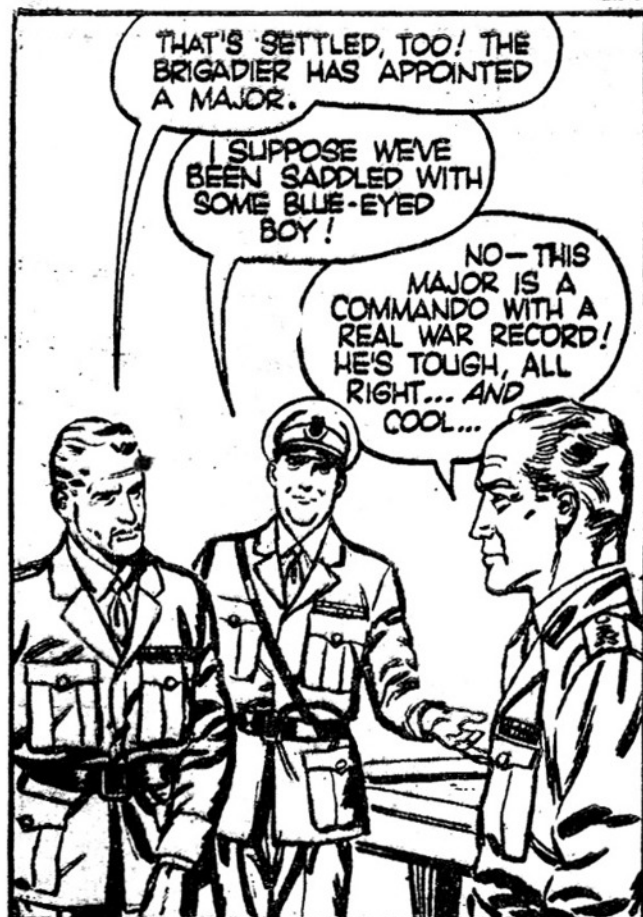
THE TECHNICIANS, WHO WILL DISMANTLE THE RADAR WILL HAVE TO BE COMMANDO-TRAINED—



HALF A DOZEN RADAR BOFFINS ARE ALREADY BEING PUT THROUGH THE MILL AT THE COMMANDO SCHOOL.

WHAT ABOUT THE OFFICER WHO'LL LEAD THE OPERATION? HE'LL NEED TO BE A MAN WITH REAL BATTLE EXPERIENCE...





MUCH HAD HAPPENED TO LENNOX SINCE THE DARK DAYS OF CRETE—AND THE MARKS OF HIS GRIM CAREER WERE VISIBLE ON HIM. INCREDIBLY LUCKY AND RECKLESS, AND YET BRAVE AND SINGLE-MINDED—THAT WAS LENNOX, A MAN WHO WAS ADMIRER—AND ALSO HATED...

A COMPLETE PLAN FOR THE JOB IS IN HAND, SIR!

I'M NOT INTERESTED! ALL THE PLANNING WILL COME FROM ME—ALL THE MEN, DOWN TO THE LAST PRIVATE, WILL BE PICKED BY ME! I WANT ABSOLUTE AND UNQUESTIONING OBEDIENCE...!




THERE WAS UTTER SILENCE IN THE ROOM. LENNOX SUDDENLY SWUNG ROUND, AND SCRUTINISED EVERY OFFICER...

ALL RIGHT! I'LL HAVE YOU—YOU LOOK SOLID AND DEPENDABLE!



THE ROOM WAS RAPIDLY
CLEARED, EXCEPT FOR THE
THREE OFFICERS LENNOX
HAD PICKED OUT...



THAT'S ALL I HAVE TO
SAY, GENTLEMEN, FOR THE
TIME BEING! BATTLES ARE WON
IN OPEN COUNTRY— NOT IN
OFFICES! TOMORROW NIGHT, AT
THIS TIME, I EXPECT TO SEE
EVERY ONE OF YOU AT
ACHNACARRY, IN THE
HIGHLANDS! HOW YOU
GET THERE IS YOUR OWN
CONCERN! GOOD NIGHT!

AND LENNOX HAD GONE...



THE MAN'S A
FANATIC!

MAYBE— BUT
AN INSPIRED ONE!
HE TOOK COMMAND
OF THE SITUATION
THE MINUTE HE
ARRIVED...!

TAKE IT FROM
ME— HE'S A DEATH-
OR-GLORY MERCHANT!

IT WAS AN UNWRITTEN LAW AMONG COMMANDOS THAT NO OFFICER OR N.C.O. HAD THE RIGHT TO SET A MAN A TASK HE COULD NOT CARRY OUT EQUALLY WELL HIMSELF. LESS THAN A DAY LATER, LENNOX HIMSELF WAS ARRIVING AT ACHNACARRY—AND HE HAD COME THE HARD WAY...



IN LESS THAN AN HOUR, MAJOR LENNOX HAD GOT DOWN TO BUSINESS...

THE TWO IMPORTANT THINGS ARE *MORALE* AND *TIMING*! I WANT THIS RAID TO GO LIKE A MACHINE—AND I WANT EVERY MAN TO BE UTTERLY AGGRESSIVE AND RUTHLESS!

YOU'VE GOT A BIG JOB ON, MAJOR—



ALL COMMANDOS WERE ASSEMBLED TO HEAR WHAT THE MAJOR HAD TO SAY...



AS THE PARADE WAS DISMISSED AMID EXCITED HUBBUB, A FAMILIAR FACE CAUGHT THE MAJOR'S EYE...



IT WAS A SERGEANT WHO HAD BEEN CALLED OVER — AND AS HE APPROACHED, LENNOX SUDDENLY GRINNED — AND THRUST OUT HIS GOOD HAND...





AND SO THE WHEELS OF CHANCE BROUGHT SERGEANT ALEC PRICE FACE TO FACE WITH LENNOX AGAIN. . .



BUT LENNOX, WHO LIVED ONLY FOR HIS MISSION, HAD FORGOTTEN A GREAT DEAL. WHEREAS SERGEANT ALEC PRICE, WHO HAD SEEN MEN DIE USELESSLY, HAD FORGOTTEN NOTHING...

HOW DID YOU GET OUT OF SPHAKIA — SPROUT WINGS?

LET'S JUST SAY WE WERE LUCKY, SIR! OUR OFFICERS ABANDONED US — BUT WE FOUGHT OUR WAY TO THE BEACH AND GOT OUT IN A LANDING CRAFT!



EVEN NOW, LENNOX DID NOT CATCH PRICE'S MEANING...

BUT, YOU HAD NO OFFICERS—

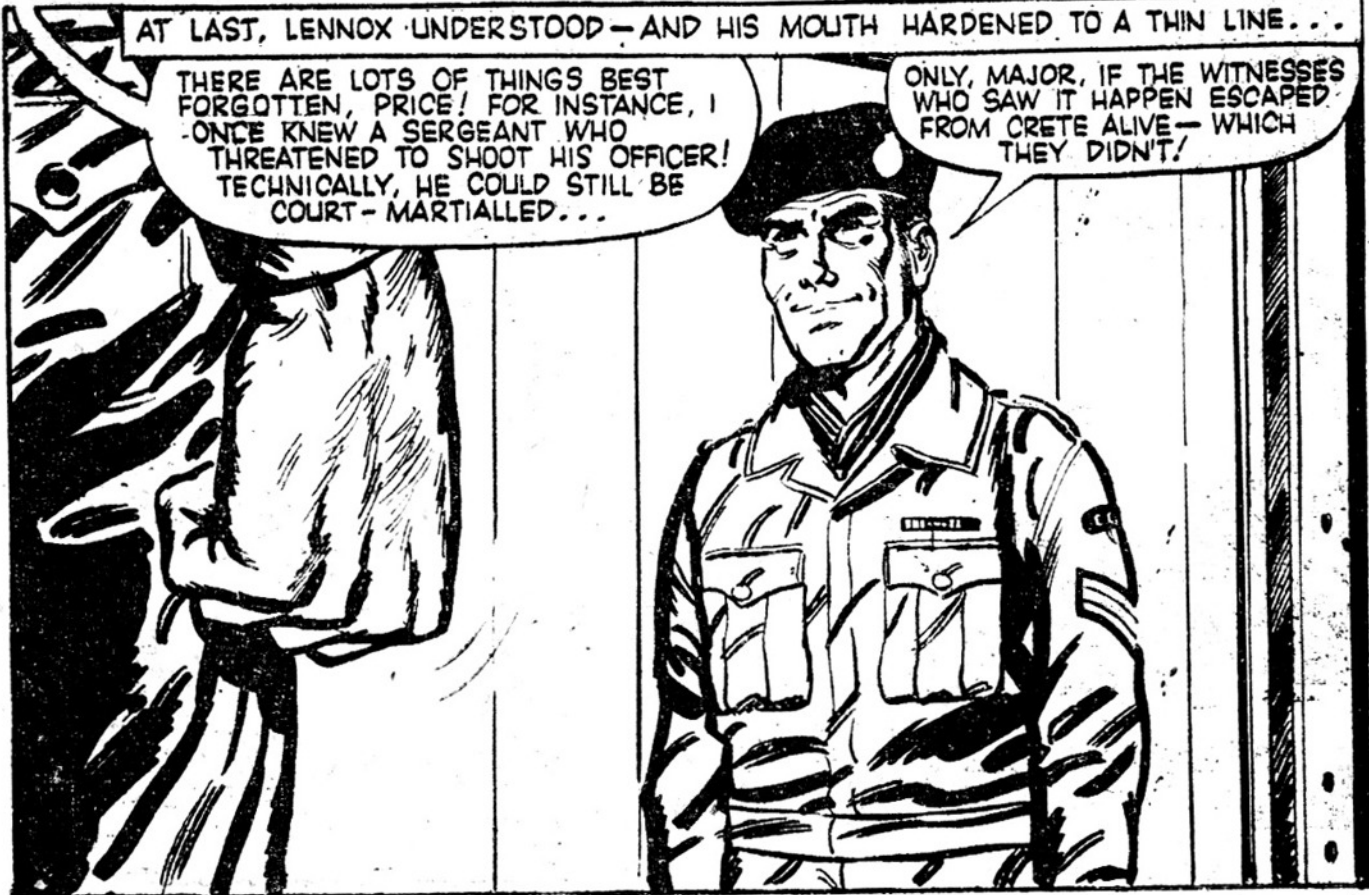
WE HAD ONE. HE TOOK OUR CAR INTO SPHAKIA— AND NEVER CAME BACK! IF THAT SAME OFFICER WERE EVER TO TURN UP ALIVE AGAIN, IT COULD ONLY MEAN ONE THING— HE RAN AWAY!



AT LAST, LENNOX UNDERSTOOD — AND HIS MOUTH HARDENED TO A THIN LINE...

THERE ARE LOTS OF THINGS BEST FORGOTTEN, PRICE! FOR INSTANCE, I ONCE KNEW A SERGEANT WHO THREATENED TO SHOOT HIS OFFICER! TECHNICALLY, HE COULD STILL BE COURT-MARTIALLED...

ONLY, MAJOR, IF THE WITNESSES WHO SAW IT HAPPEN ESCAPED FROM CRETE ALIVE — WHICH THEY DIDN'T!





OUTSIDE THE ASSEMBLY HALL, SERGEANT PRICE STOOD ALONE, IN THE KEEN MOUNTAIN AIR...

YES... SEEING THAT COWARDLY RAT AGAIN HAS BROUGHT IT ALL BACK FOR ME... THE HOT HILLSIDE, THE RUNNING MEN, THE BULLET IN THE SHOULDER! I COULD HAVE SHOT HIM DOWN LIKE A DOG, THEN... AND THE SAME FEELINGS INSIDE ME NOW!



WRESTLING WITH THE OLD ANGER INSIDE HIM, PRICE ENTERED THE SERGEANTS' HUT — TO FIND IT A HUBBUB OF EXCITED TALK...

— AND THERE WE WERE, ON SPHAKIA BEACH, WITH ONLY THESE TWO LANDING CRAFT! MY LEG WAS BAD, AND I WAS PANICKY! I WANTED LENNOX TO GRAB THE SUPPLIES IN THE OTHER CRAFT — BUT NOT HIM! 'LEAVE THEM WHERE THEY ARE,' HE SAID, 'THE MEN IN THE HILLS WILL NEED THEM!'

WHAT'S THAT?



WHEN THE SERGEANT HAD REPEATED HIS STORY...

LET'S GET THIS QUITE STRAIGHT! I WAS AT SPHAKIA TOO, CHUM. FIVE OF US REACHED THE BEACH AT MIDNIGHT. THERE WAS ONLY ONE LANDING CRAFT. WE USED IT, AND GOT AWAY. WHERE DID LENNOX COME INTO THE PICTURE?

I'M TELLING YOU! LENNOX AND I PULLED OFF AT DUSK IN THE OTHER LANDING CRAFT. I WANTED TO PINCH THE PETROL AND STORES FROM THE ONE WE LEFT BEHIND — BUT HE WOULDN'T LET ME!



ONLY SLOWLY DID SERGEANT PRICE TAKE IN THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHAT HE WAS HEARING—AND IT WAS ONE OF THE OTHER SERGEANTS WHO PUT IT INTO WORDS...

IN FACT, IT LOOKS AS THOUGH YOU OWE LENNOX YOUR LIFE, PRICE!

ME OWE LENNOX MY LIFE!



SUDDENLY WHITE WITH ANGER, PRICE SWUNG AWAY FROM THE GROUP...

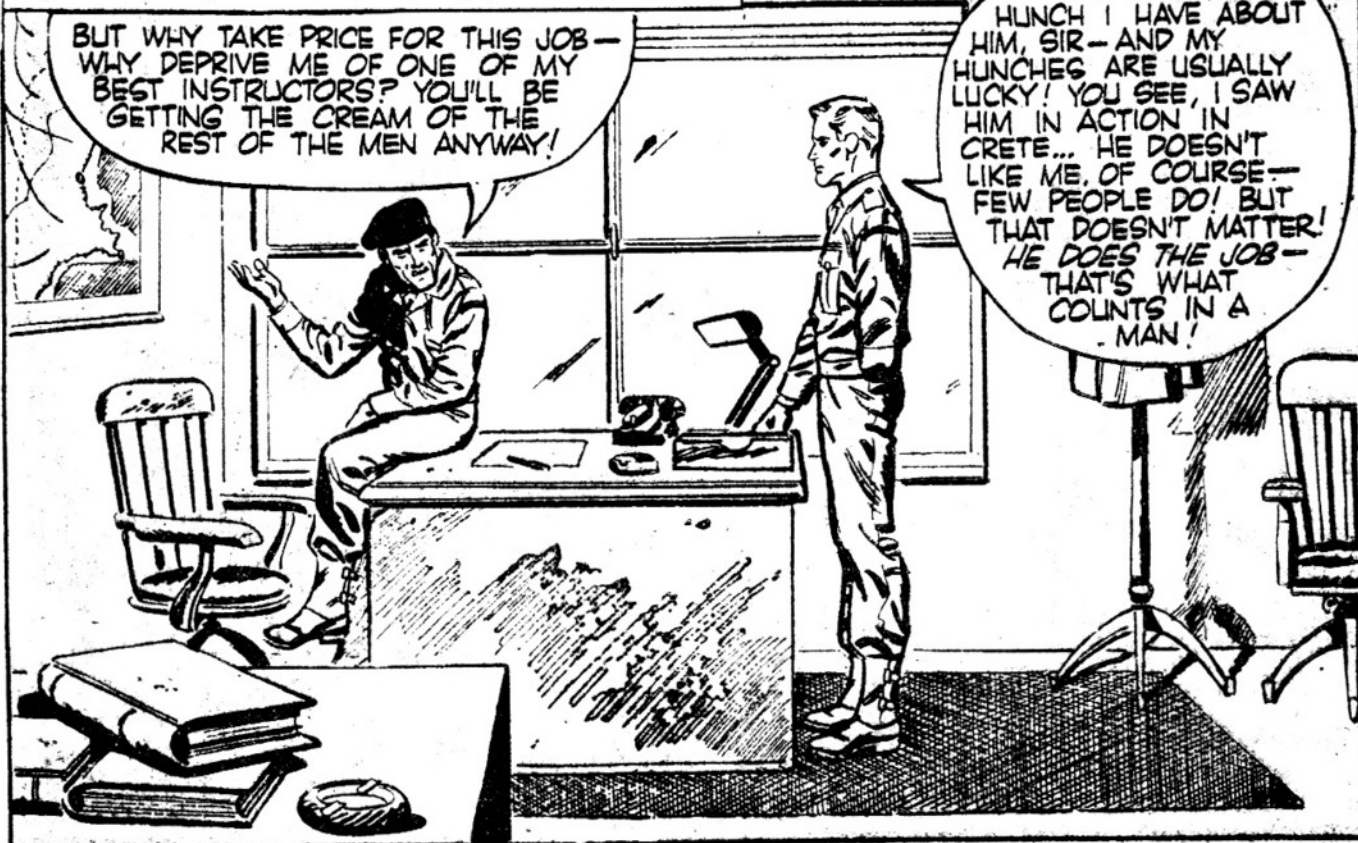
I OWE LENNOX NOTHING... NOTHING! HE SLAUGHTERED MY MEN—THAT'S HIS DEBT TO ME—AND I'LL TAKE MY POUND OF FLESH FOR IT SOME DAY, ON MY OATH I WILL!



AT THAT MOMENT, MAJOR LENNOX WAS WITH THE COLONEL IN HIS OFFICE...

BUT WHY TAKE PRICE FOR THIS JOB—WHY DEPRIVE ME OF ONE OF MY BEST INSTRUCTORS? YOU'LL BE GETTING THE CREAM OF THE REST OF THE MEN ANYWAY!

IT'S JUST A HUNCH I HAVE ABOUT HIM, SIR—AND MY HUNCHES ARE USUALLY LUCKY! YOU SEE, I SAW HIM IN ACTION IN CRETE... HE DOESN'T LIKE ME, OF COURSE—FEW PEOPLE DO! BUT THAT DOESN'T MATTER! HE DOES THE JOB—THAT'S WHAT COUNTS IN A MAN!



Chapter 4. DEBT CANCELLED

SO LENNOX PICKED HIS MEN, PRICE AMONG THEM. IN THE THREE WEEKS THAT FOLLOWED THE COMMANDO TASK FORCE TRAINED CEASELESSLY ON A STRETCH OF SCOTTISH COAST SIMILAR TO THE REAL OBJECTIVE...

AFTER ME! AND I WANT THE ASSAULT TIME CUT BY TWO MINUTES—!



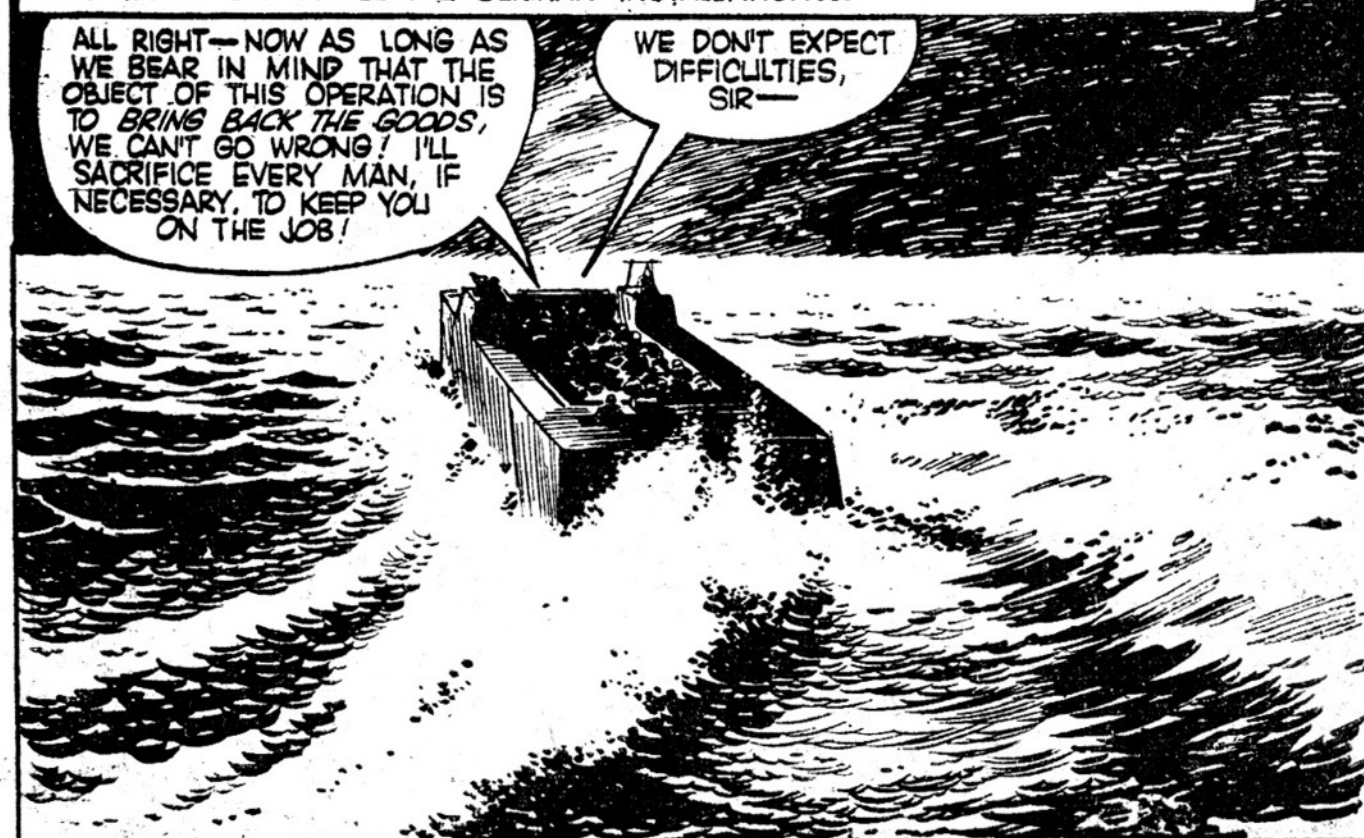
BITTER THOUGH HE WAS ABOUT THE PAST, SERGEANT PRICE HAD TO ADMIT THAT LENNOX KNEW HOW TO HANDLE MEN...



IT WAS DARK WHEN THE COMMANDOS EMBARKED FOR THE OPERATION...



L'ENNOX WAS IN THE LEADING ASSAULT CRAFT WITH THE RADAR TECHNICIANS WHO WOULD DISMANTLE THE GERMAN INSTALLATION...



Zero Hour

AT A LITTLE AFTER MIDNIGHT, THE RAIDING FORCE, GUIDED BY THE DESTROYERS, HAD REACHED A PREARRANGED BEARING OFF THE BELGIAN COAST. THEN, STEERING BY THEIR OWN COMPASSES, THE FLOTILLA OF LANDING CRAFT MOVED IN ACROSS THE LAST SEVEN MILES OF DARK SEA...



AT ONE MILE OUT, ALL WAS STILL DARKNESS, WITH ONLY THE HEAVE OF THE WAVES, AND THE THROB OF SILENCED ENGINES. THEN SUDDENLY, LURIDLY, CAME A WEAVING, BLINDING CONE OF LIGHT— THEN TWO— THEN THREE...



Zero Hour

THEN CAME TRACER, HOSEPIPING ACROSS THE SEA—
AND BEHIND IT, THE HAMMERING OF UNSEEN GUNS...

THERE GOES THE
'ELEMENT OF
SURPRISE', SARGE—
RIGHT DOWN THE
DRAIN!

MAYBE! BUT THE ENEMY
PROBABLY HASN'T GOT TROOPS
IN THE AREA— AND IT'LL TAKE
HIM TIME TO START THEM
MOVING!

AS THE BEACHES AND CLIFFS LOOMED AHEAD, THE
SEA WAS LASHED WITH MACHINE-GUN FIRE...

KEEP YOUR
HEADS DOWN
UNDER THE
ARMOUR!

THIRTY
YARDS
MORE—

AND THEN THE BOWS OF THE LEADING CRAFT WERE GRATING NOISILY ON TO THE SAND AND SHINGLE...



SERGEANT PRICE'S TASK WAS TO KNOCK OUT THE MACHINE-GUN POSTS—AND ON THE WAY IN, HE HAD BEEN NOTING THEIR POSITIONS. LENNOX AND HIS PARTY WERE ALREADY HALFWAY UP THE CLIFF...



THE GUN POSITIONS ARE STILL AS AIR RECCE SHOWED! COME ON!

LENNOX, CROUCHING ON THE CLIFF-TOP, EYES GLOWING WITH THE LIGHT OF BATTLE, WAS GAZING IMPATIENTLY TO THE LEFT—UNTIL SUDDENLY, AN ORANGE BALL OF FIRE BLOSSOMED BRIEFLY OUT, AND THERE WAS A DULL THUD...

RIGHT! PRICE HAS DEMOLISHED PILLBOX 'ABEL'—WE HAVE A CLEAR RUN IN TO THE CHATEAU! LET'S GO!



THEY MOVED LIKE DARK WRAITHS ACROSS THE OPEN SPACE, THE URGENT CLATTER OF FIRE AND COUNTER-FIRE BATTERING THEIR EARS FROM ALL SIDES...

ACCORDING TO INTELLIGENCE, THE MAIN TRANSMITTER EQUIPMENT IS ON THE CHATEAU GROUND FLOOR—

WHAT ABOUT OPPOSITION?

THERE *WON'T* BE ANY— NOT IN THERE!

AND AS LENNOX WELL KNEW, GERMAN TECHNICAL STAFF HAD NO STOMACH FOR WAR...

EVERY MAN OVER IN THAT CORNER— ONE SUSPICIOUS MOVE, AND YOU DIE!



SERGEANT PRICE, MOVING ONWARD FROM THE SHAMBLES THAT HAD BEEN MACHINE-GUN POST 'BAKER', COULD HEAR POWERFUL MOTOR ENGINES REVVING. VIOLENTLY SOMEWHERE INLAND...

SOUNDS LIKE TROOP TRANSPORTS, SARGE!

OR MAYBE AN ARMoured CAR! WHATEVER IT IS, IT CAN ONLY GET HERE BY ROAD — SO WE KNOW WHERE TO MEET IT!

THREE MINUTES LATER, WHERE THE COASTAL ROAD ENTERED THE CHATEAU GROUNDS...



IT WAS AN AMBUSH—AND THE ENEMY
HAD LITTLE IDEA WHO OR WHAT HE
WAS UP AGAINST...

GET IN AMONGST
THEM!



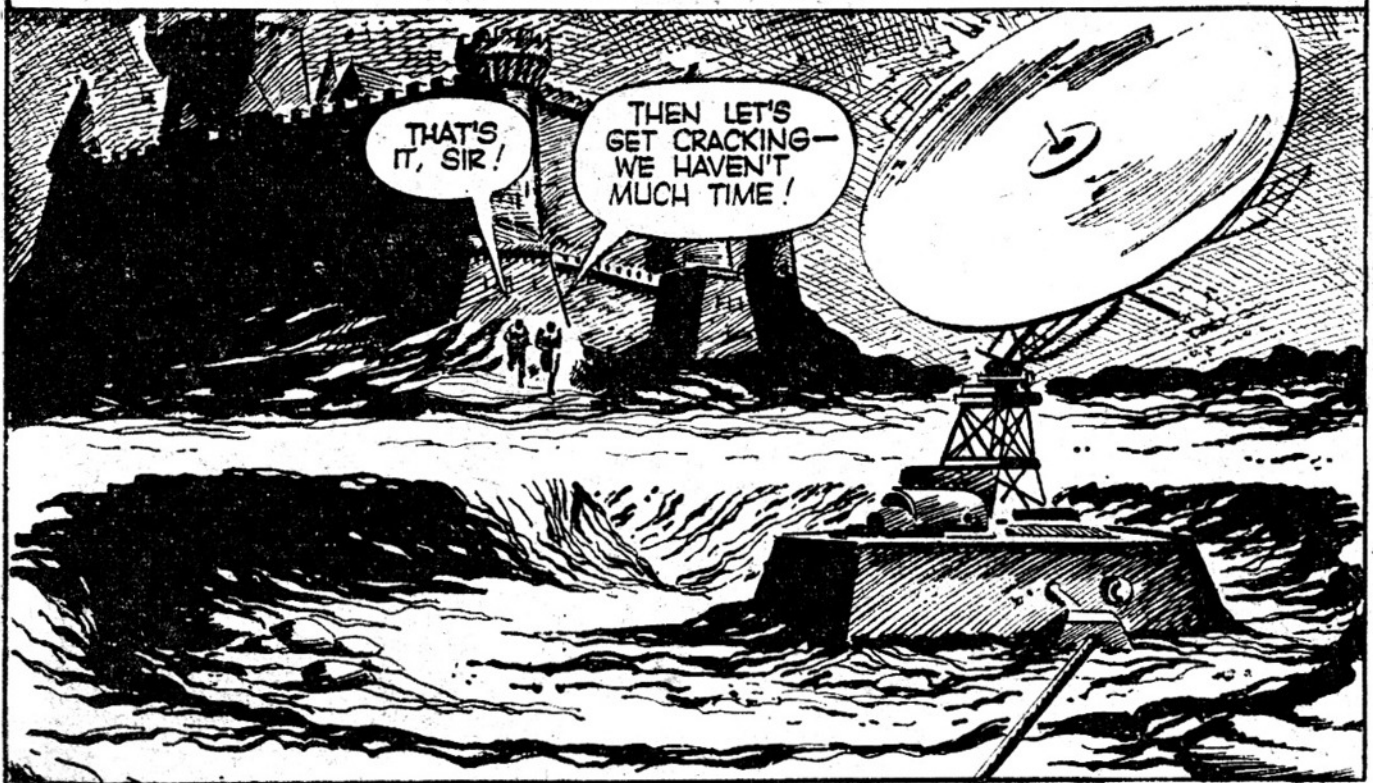
IN THE CHATEAU, THE RADAR
TECHNICIANS WERE WORKING
AGAINST TIME...

ALL RIGHT! WE'VE
REACHED OUR DEADLINE!
BACK TO THE
BEACHES—AND TAKE
ALL THE JUNK BACK
YOU HAVE TO!

WE'VE GOT ALL THE
INTERESTING BITS, SIR—
BUT THERE'S STILL MORE
TO IT THAN MEETS THE
EYE! I'M AFRAID I'LL
HAVE TO TAKE A LOOK
AT THE REFLECTOR!



THE REFLECTOR—THE RADAR TRANSMITTING BOWL—LAY ON THE LANDWARD SIDE OF THE CHATEAU. AS THE TECHNICIANS SPILLED FROM THE CHATEAU, LENNOX HEARD INFANTRY WHISTLES BLOWING—THE COMMANDO SIGNAL FOR WITHDRAWAL...



NORTH OF THE CHATEAU, SERGEANT PRICE WAS CARRYING OUT HIS PART OF THE WITHDRAWAL...



LENNOX AND THE TECHNICIAN REACHED THE TRANSMITTING BOWL...



BUT THEN, AS THE SERGEANT BEGAN TO MANIPULATE THE CYLINDER IN THE BOWL, A MACHINE-GUN SUDDENLY HAMMERED OUT...

AAAGH!



ON THE CLIFF-TOPS, SERGEANT PRICE WAS HELPING THE TECHNICIANS ON THEIR WAY DOWN THE ESCAPE ROUTE...

MAJOR LENNOX AND OUR SERGEANT STILL TO COME, SARGE! THEY HELD BACK TO LOOK AT THE TRANSMITTER BOWL—

THE MAJOR MORE THAN ANYBODY KNOWS OUR DEADLINE TIME! HE'S GOT EXACTLY TWO MINUTES TO GET HERE!



Zero Hour

AT THE TRANSMITTER BOWL, LENNOX HAD DRAGGED THE WOUNDED SERGEANT DOWN TO THE SAFETY OF THE TRENCH...

ANSWER ME, MAN— IS THIS EQUIPMENT HERE VITAL?

YES... MUST HAVE IT... TO UNDERSTAND NEW SYSTEM... NEED ... TWO MEN...

THEN WE'LL GET HELP— NOW!

ON THE CLIFF TOP, SERGEANT PRICE, GAZING IMPATIENTLY TOWARDS THE CHATEAU, SAW TWO WHITE VERY LIGHTS SUDDENLY SOAR INTO THE DARKNESS FROM BEHIND IT...

THAT'S THE MAJOR— IT'S HIS DISTRESS SIGN!

WE'D BETTER GET THERE! ALL OF YOU COME WITH ME!

CURSE YOU, LENNOX— THIS IS TYPICAL! YOU IGNORE YOUR OWN TIMING, GET YOURSELF IN A FIX, AND THEN WASTE THE LIVES OF OTHERS TO SAVE YOUR SKIN!

THE ENEMY WERE NOW MOVING IN TOWARDS THE CHATEAU— AND ALREADY, THEIR MACHINE-GUNS WERE MOUNTED TO COVER THE OPEN EXpanse BEHIND IT.

IT'S TOO LATE, SARGE—
WE'LL NEVER GET
ACROSS THERE NOW!

ONE OF US MIGHT! GIVE ME
COVERING FIRE—I'M GOING
TO HAVE A TRY!



AS THE COMMANDOS PUT UP A HEAVY FIRE FROM THEIR COVER AROUND THE CHATEAU, SERGEANT PRICE INCHED FORWARD ON HIS STOMACH ACROSS THE SHOT-RAKED OPEN SPACES. . .

BY HEAVENS, LENNOX,
THIS HAD BETTER BE
WORTH THE RISK!



THE SERGEANT REACHED THE TRANSMITTING BOWL...

NOW WHAT
THE DEVIL,
MAJOR—!

LET'S NOT WASTE TIME, PRICE!
THERE'S A PIECE OF EQUIPMENT
IN THIS THING ABOVE US WE
MUST GET OUT!

CYLINDER IN CENTRE...
JUST REALISED... SCREW TO
RIGHT... GERMAN THREAD...
I TRIED... COULDN'T... TURNED
IT WRONG WAY!

PRICE GLARED AT THE MAJOR, ALL HIS OLD
ANIMOSITY BURNING INSIDE HIM...

AND WHAT
PREVENTED
YOU—?

USE YOUR HEAD, PRICE! THE
THING WE WANT UP THERE IS
SMOOTH AND BULKY—A MAN
WOULD NEED TWO HANDS TO
BUDGE IT! HURRY, MAN,
HURRY!

REMEMBER...
SCREW TO
THE RIGHT...



WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, PRICE SWUNG HIMSELF UP OUT OF THE TRENCH, AND GROPED INTO THE CENTRE OF THE HUGE BOWL FOR THE CYLINDER, KNOWING HE WAS STARKLY OUTLINED, A PERFECT TARGET. GRASPING THE SMOOTH METAL TUBE, HE TWISTED IT TO THE RIGHT WITH BOTH HANDS AND ALL HIS STRENGTH—AND EVEN AS IT MOVED, THE UNSEEN MACHINE-GUN CLATTERED, AND HE WAS STRUCK BY A HAMMERBLOW.

I'LL GET THIS THING—I'LL GET IT—THEY CAN GUN ME INTO RIBBONS, AND I'LL STILL GET IT...

AT LAST, CLUTCHING THE LONG, MIRROR-SMOOTH CYLINDER, THE SERGEANT FELL BACK INTO THE TRENCH...

THERE'S YOUR GADGET, MAJOR! NOW GRAB IT, AND GET OUT!

NO, PRICE—YOU WON IT, SO YOU TAKE IT BACK! I'M STAYING WITH THE TECHNICIAN...

THREE RED FLARES SUDDENLY SOARED UP FROM THE BEACH AREA—A FINAL WARNING THAT THE LANDING CRAFT WERE READY TO PULL OUT.

YOU SAVED MY LIFE, ONCE, MAJOR—YOU LEFT ME A LANDING CRAFT—AND I HATE THE IDEA OF OWING YOU EVEN A BRASS FARTHING! SO I'M CANCELLING THE DEBT—I'M GIVING YOU YOUR LIFE! GET OUT!



IN SILENCE, MAJOR LENNOX REACHED OUT AND TOOK THE CYLINDER...



AND THEN THE MAJOR WAS GONE...

LEAVE ME...
GET AWAY...

I COULDN'T, FRIEND—NOT EVEN IF
I WANTED TO! YOU SEE, I'VE HAD IT!
CAN'T MOVE MY LEGS! BUT I WOULDN'T
TELL HIM THAT! 'MAD' LENNOX, THEY
CALL HIM—MIGHT HAVE STAYED—
IMPERILLED THE MISSION...



THREE HUNDRED YARDS AWAY, THE
MAJOR HAD REACHED THE CLIFFS...

I SHOULD HAVE GONE BACK...
I SHOULD HAVE CHUCKED THE
INSTRUMENT AT THESE MEN,
AND GONE BACK! THAT'S WHAT
PRICE WOULD HAVE DONE, IF
THINGS HAD BEEN REVERSED!
BUT IT IS TOO LATE NOW—
AND I'M GOING TO LIVE WITH
THAT THOUGHT FOR THE
REST OF MY LIFE!

COME ON,
SIR!



AND IN THE NARROW TRENCH, UNDER THE GREAT TRANSMITTER 'BOWL', SERGEANT ALEC PRICE HAD BEGUN HIS LAST AND GREATEST BATTLE. HE DID NOT HEAR THE THROB OF ENGINES AS THE FLOTILLA MOVED AWAY—HE HEARD ONLY THE CLATTER OF A MACHINE-GUN, AND THE THUD OF GRENADES, AS THE ENEMY MOVED IN. HE KNEW THAT THE CHIPS WERE FINALLY DOWN. BUT IT WAS HE WHO HAD FLUNG THEM DOWN. AND HE HAD NO REGRETS...

IT'S CURTAINS, FRIEND—WE NEEDN'T KID OURSELVES! BUT BY THE LORD HARRY, WE'LL TAKE THEM WITH US AS WE GO—WE'LL TAKE THEM WITH US!



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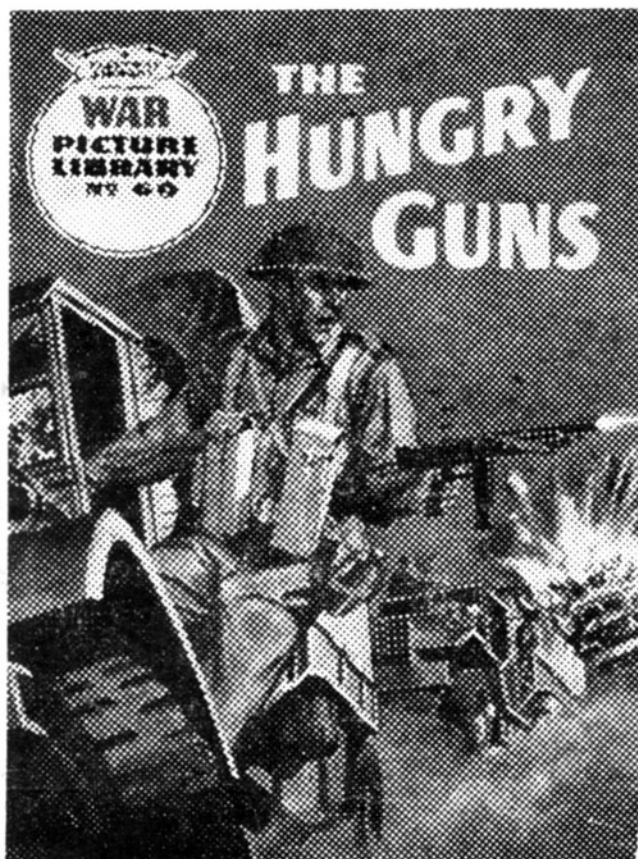
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